

U.S. Is Said to Have Given Pretoria Intelligence on Rebel Organization

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 22 — The United States, working closely with British intelligence, has provided South Africa with intelligence about the banned and exiled African National Congress, according to current and former Government officials.

The congress is the principal guerrilla group seeking the overthrow of the South African Government and the end of apartheid.

Warnings of Planned Attacks

A senior Administration official, who did not wish to be named, categorically denied today that any intelligence on the African National Congress had been exchanged between the United States and South Africa.

But the present and former officials interviewed for this article said that the information, including political intelligence as well as specific warnings of planned attacks by the group, was given to South Africa by the Reagan Administration at least into the mid-1980's, although they could not be specific about when during the Reagan years it began. South Africa, in return, has reported on Soviet and Cuban activities in the region, the sources said.

It could not be determined whether the United States was still providing information on the African National Congress. Nor could it be learned whether South Africa had used the information to prevent African National Congress attacks or to prepare for South African raids on the congress's bases in Mozambique and elsewhere in southern Africa.

Because South Africa has no satellite intelligence ability, the sources said, it has been dependent on the United States and Britain for communications intelligence from the black nations in Africa beyond the range of its own interception equipment.

The sources, who include former White House aides in the Reagan and Carter Administrations, said the United States and South Africa had exchanged sensitive intelligence under an arrangement dating from the 1960's. But they said the data initially concerned Soviet shipping and submarine movements in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean.

White House Won't Comment

The sharing of information about the African National Congress with the South African Directorate of Military Intelligence was described as part of a reversal of a policy established under the Carter Administration, which had banned any sharing of intelligence with South Africa. It could not be learned whether President Reagan or any of his senior advisers specifically ordered or acquiesced in the policy change.

Edward P. Djerejian, a White House spokesman, asked for comment about the sources' account, said, "We simply do not discuss or comment on intelligence operations or alleged intelligence operations."

Senior officials of the State Department, the Defense Department and the South African Embassy in Washington, informed last week of the former and current Administration officials' accounts, also said they would have no comment.

American intelligence officials said a special focus of the intelligence shared with the South African Directorate of Military Intelligence originated from the interception of communications between the African National Congress headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia, its guerrilla training camps in Angola and its offices in Africa and Western Europe.

Most of the conversations are conducted "in the clear" — that is, un-coded — and the electronic "take" has included specific advance information on planned bombings and disruptions by the congress, officials said.

Administration Debate Over Group's Ideology

Many of Mr. Reagan's senior national security officials, the sources asserted in interviews, took office convinced that the leadership of the African National Congress was dominated by pro-Soviet Communists, and that providing South Africa with information on the group was in the American national interest.

Other officials, including current members of the Administration, disagree with this view, arguing that the congress is primarily a nationalist group whose views must be taken into consideration.

Last year, the State Department publicly urged South Africa to take part in talks with the African National Congress and to release its imprisoned leader, Nelson Mandela. A senior official was quoted as saying that United States policy called for South Africa to be "reaching as broadly and widely as it can," including contacts with the African National Congress.

The African National Congress has been recognized by the United Nations General Assembly and the Organization of African Unity as a national liberation movement. It has offices in more than 30 countries.

"It all comes down to what you believe about the A.N.C.," one former senior Reagan Administration official said in acknowledging that communications intelligence on the organization had been relayed to South Africa. He described the congress as a dangerous revolutionary organization controlled by Communists and said, "Our interests require helping the South Africans."

An intelligence officer now serving in the Reagan Administration, acknowledging that the African National Congress had been a major target of American intelligence-gathering, said: "I've known about it for a long time, that we target the A.N.C. We've always considered them to be the bad guys, to be Soviet pawns, stalking horses for the Soviets."

South Africa, in a Government booklet published early last month, asserted that 23 of the 30 members of the congress's executive committee "are known to have membership with" the South African Communist Party, which was outlawed in 1960.

Oliver Tambo, the group's president in exile, acknowledged in a newspaper interview last year that there was "an overlapping of membership" between the two groups, but said: "It is often suggested that the A.N.C. is controlled by the Communist Party, by Communists. Well, I have been long enough in the A.N.C. to know that that has never been true."

Some Reagan Administration officials acknowledged that disclosure of United States-South African intelligence-sharing would heighten the rebel group's suspicions about the Administration's intentions and policies on South Africa.

Despite Restrictions, A Continued Flow

Shortly after taking office in 1977, the Carter Administration ordered a ban on the sharing of any intelligence with South Africa, the sources said. But they said intelligence on Soviet and Cuban activities in southern Africa nonetheless continued to flow to South Africa, apparently because elements in United States intelligence agencies chose to evade the ban.

Continued

The sources said no intelligence on the African National Congress was forwarded to South Africa before 1981, when President Reagan took office.

The sources for the account included a former member of the National Security Agency who said he disagreed with the policy of sharing intelligence with South Africa.

Senior American intelligence officials acknowledged that there is a general understanding among United States intelligence agencies prohibiting the passing of intelligence about a second country to a third.

"If you're asked by a third country what you saw in a second country," a senior Reagan Administration intelligence official said, "you're not to respond." Exceptions are made for Britain, some other selected Atlantic allies and Israel, the officials said, but all other contacts are to be authorized in advance.

What the U.S. Gets From South Africa

Former officials of the National Security Agency, describing the nature of the intelligence-sharing relationship, said the agency had traditionally relied on the South African Directorate of Military Intelligence for data on Soviet shipping and submarine activities around the Cape of Good Hope and in the Indian Ocean.

American representatives of the National Security Agency were posted at Silvermine, a South African intelligence installation near Cape Town, by the early 1970's, and reports on Soviet shipping were routinely flowing from South Africa to the National Security Agency's headquarters at Fort Meade, Md., according to former officials of the agency.

Most of those reports, they said, were relayed through installations of the Government Communications Headquarters, the British counterpart of the National Security Agency and the United States' closest ally in the collection and distribution of communications intelligence worldwide.

Officials said South Africa's intelligence installations were vastly expanded in the mid-1970's, as the Soviet Union and Cuba became directly involved, along with the Central Intelligence Agency and South Africa, in the civil war that broke out in Angola after the Portuguese withdrew in 1975.

Former National Security Agency officials said vast quantities of electronic equipment, including antennas and sophisticated interception receivers, were secretly shipped from Britain and West Germany to South Africa to enable the South Africans to build more listening sites.

American-made computer chips and other electronic components were involved in the shipments, according to former White House aides, although under Presidential directives against such shipments to South Africa the components could have been barred. The shipment of such materials was initially barred by President Kennedy, and later Administrations continued the ban, at least publicly.

But national security officials of the Ford Administration chose to look to look the other way, the sources said, in a successful effort to avoid any public debate over the American and British role in aiding South Africa's intelligence abilities.

In the Carter Administration, Richard M. Moose, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, ordered an end to all collaboration on communications intelligence between the United States and South Africa. Former officials of the National Security Agency said the liaison nonetheless continued, with South Africa continuing to report on Soviet submarine and shipping activity.

"Moose thought he had stopped it," a senior Carter Administration official recalled, "but the Navy really went bonkers on this and it wasn't stopped."

There was no reason to believe that the National Security Agency was then sharing with the South Africans any of its separately collected intelligence on the black countries south of the Sahara, including Angola, Zambia and Mozambique, the official added.

Shopping Lists Exchanged in Britain

A former National Security Agency officer, discussing the British role in the sharing of intelligence with South Africa, recalled attending a high-level meeting in the mid-1980's at the headquarters of the Government Communications Headquarters at Cheltenham, 90 miles northwest of London. At the meeting, he said, senior American and British officials reviewed previous intelligence assignments and future targets — a process known in intelligence jargon as "tasking."

After long discussions of American and British interception programs involving the Soviet Union and the Middle East, the officials turned to Africa. The meeting was led by a British representative of the Government Communications Headquarters with a small group of American intelligence officials, including two senior officials from National Security Agency headquarters, actively taking part.

At this point, the former National Security Agency officer said, three South African military intelligence officers were ushered into the room. The South Africans and the British exchanged tasking requirements — sophisticated documents outlining previous communications intelligence targets, such as a third-world embassy, and the frequencies on which they relayed intelligence and other communications.

According to the former official, the delegations from the American and British agencies asked South Africa to continue its efforts to monitor Soviet and Cuban activity in Angola and Mozambique, as well as Soviet shipping and submarine activity around the Cape of Good Hope.

The South Africans were asked to

provide their reports on Soviet and Cuban activity on a weekly basis, instead of reporting monthly, as they had in the past. Other targets were to include Soviet commercial and economic activity south of the Sahara, with special emphasis on support for the rebels in South-West Africa, or Namibia, where South Africa has been engaged in a guerrilla war with the South-West Africa People's Organization.

In return, a participant said, the South African delegation had its own requirements for American and British intelligence. Two copies of a South African document were turned over, outlining previous targets for the United States and Britain and new targets to be added to the day-to-day intelligence collection.

These included a South African request that an extensive array of political, military, diplomatic and economic activity south of the Sahara be collected and relayed to Pretoria, including intercepted information dealing with the Governments of Angola, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana, the former National Security Agency official recalled.

"I saw the list," the former official said, "and they also wanted any and all tasking related to the A.N.C., including the movements of Oliver Tambo. We got a list of 10 people of Tambo's staff — the A.N.C. high command — and they wanted information from us."

The South African request "appeared routine" and "nobody seemed surprised about it," the officer said, although he recalled his personal surprise at how "extensive" the cooperation was between the South Africans and the United States and Britain.

One specific request for the United States was to monitor the international travel of Mr. Tambo and report when he was taking flights aboard Soviet and Cuban airlines. There was also specific mention of the frequencies on which the Governments of Zambia, Mozambique, Angola and Tanzania transmitted intelligence and diplomatic information; the National Security Agency and the Government Communications Headquarters were asked to monitor those frequencies for items of interest to South Africa, the former official said.

A 'Special Emphasis' On Guerrilla Group

Most important, the former official said, the South Africans made what was known among intelligence officials as a "special emphasis" request from the South Africans for the African Na-

Continued

tional Congress's communications.

The South Africans listed the frequencies used by the rebel group and the pattern of when they talked, the official said. It was clear, the official added, that the South African Directorate of Military Intelligence was unable to independently intercept all of the communications it deemed essential.

The African National Congress's communication system was arranged much like a normal military command, the South Africans explained, with military communications dominating the traffic by day and political and covert activities discussed at night. The former National Security Agency official said most of the interceptions of African National Congress communications in Zambia were the responsibility of the Government Communications Headquarters, the British agency, which has far more extensive communications intelligence coverage in Africa than the National Security Agency.

By the early 1980's, the former official said, the African National Congress was considered by the National Security Agency to have the status of an international organization, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization, and assigned surveillance to what was then known in the agency as the G-Group, which is responsible for the monitoring of all non-Communist countries.

Former National Security Agency officials described tasking conferences, such as the one in Cheltenham, as designed to carry out previously established policy. Inevitably, the number of targets whose signals are to be intercepted expands with each conference. The conferences are normally held more than once a year.

It could not be learned which of the South African requests were new or simply reiterations of previously agreed-upon targets. Senior Carter Administration intelligence officials said, however, that no such tasking conferences took place before 1981.

Many of the targets included in the South African tasking document, the participant said, were designated by what is known in the National Security Agency as "case notation," letter and number designators that enable the collected data to be properly routed by computer in the vast information retrieval systems used by the agency and by British intelligence.

Former National Security Agency officials said the fact that African National Congress targets were installed in the case notation system was evidence that the information-sharing arrangement was permanent, not ad hoc.

"To put it in case notation," an official said, "means that it's an institutional and organized effort. It allows you to technically manage the issue."

Such exchanges have taken place in the past, other officials of the agency noted, especially with countries in those areas of the world where the agency and its British counterpart

nave little intelligence coverage, such as in South Africa.

"In some cases," a former senior National Security Agency official explained, the liaison "ran counter to diplomacy or larger moral issues."

"What the Fort does is considered technical and not diplomatic," the former official added, referring to the agency's headquarters at Fort Meade, and it is rarely if ever shared with the State Department. The National Security Agency's attitude toward questions of diplomacy or morality, the former official added, is: "So what? On a worldwide basis we need the coverage."